

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-883-7150-4

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: DhakaPA@state.gov

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



THE CASE FOR KOSOVO'S INDEPENDENCE

By

Geeta Pasi

U.S. Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. in Bangladesh

The United States applauds the major step Europe recently took toward the goal of a continent whole, free and at peace. Recognition of Kosovo's independence frees both the people who live there and their neighbors to move beyond the conflicts of the 1990s and pursue a wider vision of integration with an undivided Euro-Atlantic community. It marks the final stage of Yugoslavia's slow-motion breakup.

Peace and prosperity in Europe has been a fundamental goal of President Bush's foreign policy and of Presidents who preceded him for almost a century. From our entry into the Great War and President Wilson's 14 points, through World War II and the Marshall Plan, to support for NATO and EU enlargement after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States has shown its commitment to Europe's security and well-being.

Beginning in 1989, ethnic Albanians, who constitute over 90 percent of Kosovo's population, suffered brutal repression and ethnic cleansing at the hands of the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. After NATO's intervention brought a halt to the violence in 1999, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 ended Belgrade's rule over Kosovo and established a temporary UN administration. For nine years, the people of Kosovo waited patiently for clarity about their future.

Nine years is long enough. Europe and the U.S. supported negotiations to find a mutually acceptable solution to the problem of Kosovo's status. Despite two years of talks led first by the UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and then by a troika made up of the EU, Russia, and the United States, the two sides remained irreconcilable on the basic question of whether Kosovo should be independent. Acknowledging this deadlock, Special Envoy Ahtisaari

developed a comprehensive proposal for Kosovo's status, including a recommendation that Kosovo become independent subject to a period of international supervision.

The United States, Europe and a majority of UN Security Council members supported this plan. We all agreed that independence is the only viable outcome for Kosovo. Due to the legacy of conflict and mutual mistrust, there is no way in which the people of Serbia and Kosovo could remain in a functional, democratic state. The broken pieces of Yugoslavia simply cannot be put back together again.

Instead of letting the situation deteriorate into crisis, Europe and the United States decided to act. We could not let the status quo continue -- more years of limbo would have turned Kosovo into an incubator for frustrations and instability, with woeful consequences for all of Europe. We could not let Kosovo's uncertain future cloud Kosovo's economic prospects, further depriving Kosovo of badly needed loans from the IMF and World Bank.

Kosovo is now independent. Our task is to help the leadership and the people of Kosovo develop this new state into a self-sustaining, multi-ethnic country that is no longer a ward of the international community.

We were deeply impressed that in their declaration of independence, Kosovo's leaders committed themselves to achieve the highest standards of democracy, including freedom and tolerance for citizens of all ethnic backgrounds. As President Bush has remarked, "these are principles that honor human dignity; they are values America looks for in a friend."

These aspirations of Kosovars should resonate deeply among Bangladeshis, who nearly four decades ago also sought independence from an artificially created state based on ethnic, linguistic, and cultural factors. We therefore urge Bangladesh to join us in embracing an independent Kosovo so its people can enjoy the fruits of nationhood as fully as you do.

No country in Europe will benefit more from Kosovo's independence than Serbia itself. Further anxiety over the outcome would have continued Serbia's obsession with Kosovo and encouraged false hopes, distracting Serbia's leaders from addressing the concerns of their citizens and Serbia's own European future. Serbia's own people deserve better, and are actually demanding it.

Much has been heard of the strong nationalist impulse and the romantic attachment that Serbs feel for Kosovo. In fact, polls show that more than 70% of Serbians want integration with the EU and cite unemployment as a greater concern than Kosovo's fate. Serbia needs to take up

its rightful place in Europe, the Transatlantic Community, and the world. Europe and the United States stand ready to welcome it. The great prosperity and stability that has come to the other nations that have joined the Euro-Atlantic community is the promise that now beckons the great nations of southeast Europe. The tragedy of Yugoslavia's demise is now history. Together we can move beyond the legacy of war toward a brighter future for all.

=====

NOTE TO THE EDITOR: If you decide to publish this op-ed, we would like to request you to publish it in full and not to edit any portion.

GR/ 2008

Note: A Bangla translation of this article is also available at the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section, Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: DhakaPA@state.gov; Website: [http:// dhaka.usembassy.gov](http://dhaka.usembassy.gov)